



Interview Tips

Interviews should be conducted in a manner that provides an objective analysis of each candidate's ability to successfully fulfill the responsibilities of the position. The following measures will help to foster equity in the interview process:

- Copies of the committee's critical criteria should be available in a checklist format, when possible, as part of the standard procedure for interviews.
- Structure all aspects of the interview, including questions asked, to ensure consistency for each applicant.
- Ensure the interviewing team has a diverse make-up.
- Inform committee members of all compliance requirements regarding pre-employment inquiries.
- Give equitable time and exposure in the interviewing process to each candidate.
- Avoid restrictive scheduling of applicant interviews (e.g., consider giving telephone or Skype interviews to out-of-town candidates or others who may be unable to interview onsite).

General Interview Questions

The following are sample questions designed to help the interviewer(s) elicit information in a way that is not confrontational or threatening to the applicant. These questions may or may not be job-related for a particular position.

| DON'T USE | DO USE |
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| Did you enjoy your last job? | Tell me what you enjoyed about your last job. |
| Do you feel you learned a lot in your degree program? | What things, related to this job, do you feel you learned most about in your degree program? |
| Were you attracted to seek work here because of the salary being offered? | What was it that attracted you to our organization? |
| Do you feel you are qualified for this job? | Describe how you feel you are qualified for this job. |
| Haven't you've changed jobs rather often? | How do you feel about the frequency with which you have changed jobs? |
| Have you ever been required to demonstrate leadership? | In what ways have you been required to demonstrate leadership in the past? |
| Wouldn't it have been better just to admit you made a mistake? | Given the opportunity, what would you have done to improve? |
| Have you found that people react that way to you often? | Why did you feel people reacted in that way? |
| Have you ever had personality clashes with other people in your workplace? | How did you feel about the people you worked with? |

| DON'T USE | DO USE |
|--|---|
| A great deal of that kind of work has to be done in this job, and I get the impression you don't enjoy doing it. | Was there anything about that kind of work you didn't like? |
| I suppose you left that department because there was a disagreement? | Why did you decide to transfer to a different department? |
| Were you ever asked to make decisions? | How much contact did you have with your boss on a day-to-day basis? |
| Were you closely supervised on your last job? | What are you looking for in a job change at this time? |
| Naturally, we want someone to stay with our department for a number of years – do you anticipate you would be able to do that? | Was there anything about the company that you didn't particularly like or agree with? |
| I've heard that was a terrible school to work for – do you agree? | Could you describe some particularly tough problems you had to deal with? |
| We need someone who can really solve problems in this department – have you ever done that before? | Describe the kind of responsibilities you've been asked to assume in the past. |

Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities

| DON'T ASK | OKAY TO SAY OR ASK |
|---|---|
| ...about visible characteristics such as scars, burns, or amputations. | ...if the applicant can stand for a certain period of time (or sit, climb, type, etc.) IF required to perform the essential functions of the job. |
| ...if the applicant is in good health or if the applicant has ever had a drug or drinking problem. | ..."Can you lift 30 pounds?" IF the job requires employees in the position applied for to lift 30 pounds. |
| ...if the applicant ever had an injury or disease, or ever filed a workers' compensation claim. | ...about job duties or their previous employment. |
| ...even if an applicant volunteers information about a medical condition, don't inquire about the nature or extent of the condition, or if it is in remission. | ...if the applicant volunteers information about a medical condition, explain the University's commitment to equal employment opportunity, and ask what you can do to accommodate the applicant. |
| ...whether the applicant's family or acquaintances are ill or injured. | ...whether the applicant can reach the top drawer of a filing cabinet, IF filing is an essential job function. |
| ...for an in-house only job, don't ask if the applicant has a driver's license. | ...IF an essential function of the job is to drive, you may ask if the applicant has a valid driver's license. |
| ...why the applicant uses a wheel chair or crutches, or how the person came to be blind, etc. | ...IF the applicant asks about an accommodation, ask the person for suggestions. |
| ...about limitations or what the person can NOT do. | ...if the applicant can perform the essential functions listed in the job description, with or without a reasonable accommodation. |

Tips for Tactful Interviewing

Of all the employment selection processes, the interview holds the greatest potential for bias and subjectivity. However, effective interviews conducted by people who work to avoid cognitive biases and stereotyped attitudes are useful in assessing candidates' capabilities. Every effort should be made to ensure there is diversity on the interviewing team, particularly with respect to ethnicity and gender. The following are some basic guidelines for the interview process:

- **Interruptions:** Avoid interruptions. Failure to do so signals to the applicant that he or she is not as important as “rush phone calls” or intermittent “report signing.”
- **Individual Treatment:** A natural tendency when interviewing a number of applicants for a position is to begin treating each person as if he/she were the same. Each applicant is distinct individual and should be treated accordingly.
- **First Impressions:** It is important to conduct interviews in a timely manner. Your promptness indicates the importance of timeliness to the candidates. Being late suggests that conditions are hectic or that tardiness is condoned in the workplace. Try to provide a neat, quiet, and orderly environment for the interview. Be friendly and warm. Provide a good first impression of your department to each candidate you interview.
- **Listening:** Avoid the temptation to introduce your own thoughts frequently during the interview. The applicant is not there to hear about your experiences. Remember, you have a limited time to learn as much as you can about each applicant.
- **Questions Unrelated to the Job:** Inquiries that are unrelated to the position may be unlawful (e.g. age, marital status, pregnancy, children, etc.), waste time, and do not provide useful selection information. Avoid asking questions during the interview that are irrelevant to the job requirements.
- **Arguments/Confrontations:** An effective employment interview is not a contest. The interviewer should not let his or her pride interfere with efforts to obtain relevant information. Verbal disagreements or disputes among the interviewers, or between the interviewer and the applicant, have no place in the interview process.
- **Making Promises:** If you know the exact salary and benefits offered by the hiring unit or department, you may want to discuss these during the interview. Interviewers should never, however, make promises that cannot be fulfilled (e.g. if you cannot ensure definite advancement within a few years of hire, do not say there is a possibility of advancement). The applicant is very impressionable at this point and will remember all promises, no matter how vaguely stated. Do not make a job offer during, or immediately following, the end of the first interview with any candidate. Time should be taken to fully consider the interview and study what you have learned.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** A closed door, a private or quiet environment, your own sensitivity will go a long way towards assuring the applicant that you will treat information he/she shares with you confidentially.

- **Allowing Sufficient Interview Time:** Do not attempt to conduct too many interviews in a limited period of time. The time allotted for each interview should be governed primarily by the complexity of the job. Typically, an hour and a half is considered adequate for an average job of average complexity.
- **Questioning Attitude Directly:** Using the phrase “Your attitude...” can be potentially negative or caustic. Substitute phrases like “What is your philosophy about...?” instead, to help make the applicant feel more fairly treated. Make sure such questions are job-related.
- **Taking Notes:** Some interviewers find it helpful to take brief notes during an interview. It is important, however, to refrain from the appearance of taking exceptionally careful or excessive notes when a candidate discusses sensitive or personal information. Doing so may prevent the applicant from being open during the rest of the interview. When a sensitive subject emerges, it is best to drop the pencil and listen with interest and sincerity.
- **Limiting the Interview to Questions:** Using comments and questions during an interview is important. A well-placed comment or question can “echo,” or provide support for something an applicant has just said, encouraging further explanation on that subject, or other issues in the interview. The use of comments, as well as questions, during the interview helps prevent the applicants from perceiving themselves as being under interrogation.
- **Language Level:** Generally, make an effort to use language, questions, and comments that reflect the educational level of the candidate and the position to be filled. Do not “talk down” or “talk above” a candidate. Be natural.
- **The Halo Effect:** The “halo effect” causes the interviewer to feel generally good about an applicant, usually because of something observed early in the interview process. The interviewer should make a deliberate effort to keep from making quick judgments—especially in areas where there may be a strong, personal bias, such as with a person’s appearance.
- **Impatience:** There will be occasions when an applicant does not go in the direction you anticipate or desire during a job interview. It is important to be patient. Through an interviewer’s use of open-ended questions, silence, and listening, the applicant will usually “come around.” Any impatience displayed by an interviewer usually causes an applicant to feel anxious and can result in the failure to obtain relevant information needed.
- **Discrimination:** Resist the temptation to unconsciously “raise the bar” by imposing higher qualification standards for female or minority candidates.
- **Quick Decisions:** A natural tendency for interviewers is to quickly decide who the “best” candidate is, especially if he/she is one of the first interviewees. Take your time and carefully evaluate all candidates, using the criteria established for the position.

